

Book Reviews

Cathy Ross and Stephen B. Bevans, *Mission on the Road to Emmaus: Constants, Context, and Prophetic Dialogue*, Orbis, Maryknoll, NY, 2015. 280 pp. \$40.00. ISBN: 9781626981355.

We live in an age of noise. We are encouraged to talk, to always have a response or an opinion. One just needs to turn to the latest news channel to hear people talking over each other in a spiral of political thought and opinion. This is what we're taught dialogue is supposed to be—a sort of contest between opposing forces, a fight to the death for the loudest voice.

How refreshing it is, then, to have an assortment of authors across the spectrum of religious thought agree on what is most necessary in this current climate of political and religious unrest: listening. *Mission on the Road to Emmaus* is a compilation edited by respected theologians Stephen B. Bevans, professor emeritus of mission and culture at the Catholic Theological Union, and Cathy Ross, general secretary of the International Association for Mission Studies, featuring a variety of missiologists and practitioners reflecting on the idea of “prophetic dialogue.” This term was coined by Bevans and Roger P. Schroeder in a previous edition to describe a new (or perhaps ancient?) way of engaging in mission; as a dance that is “based on the beautiful but complex rhythm of dialogue and prophecy, boldness and humility, learning and teaching, letting go and speaking out”¹).

In essence, prophetic dialogue is an attempt to thin out the language of contextual theology and apply it to the life of the missionary, the person who carries with them the good news of resurrection and salvation into every area of life; arguably, this person is every follower of Jesus Christ, each person who continues to call themselves by the label “Christian.” The Christian is to be one who listens and engages in deep relationship with others while also speaking out about the transformation of the world in and through Christ. Engaging in prophetic dialogue is ultimately about the “communication of the gospel, about offering a word of hope, about commitment to justice, peacemaking and reconciliation” (xv).

The authors make a significant effort to unpack and come to grips with the concept of prophetic dialogue, applying it to various streams of thought in the field of theology and mission. While I appreciated much of the theological discussion, what stood out is the paradox or tension found in the relationship between listening and proclaiming. Right from the beginning, Bevans and Ross emphasize that the first step of evangelism is not spoken word but attentive ears and relationship: “deep

¹ Stephen B. Bevans and Roger Schroeder, *Prophetic Dialogue: Reflections on Christian Mission Today* (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis, 2011), xiii.

listening, docility (the ability to be taught), gentleness, the ability to forge real relationships” (xii).

Many of the authors riff on this theme of listening, emphasizing the need for authentic relationship in order for prophetic dialogue to take place. Emma Wild-Wood asks how listening and a posture of prophetic dialogue can be informed by the lens of migration. “A spirituality of displacement,” she writes, “allows those of different cultures to listen and learn from one another” (64). Frances Adeney, in her chapter on contributions from contemporary women to the idea of prophetic dialogue, describes a posture that involves “listening deeply with a presence and respect that honours others and a humility that learns from them” (151). Ultimately, listening is an important word to describe how we should interact not only with fellow human beings but also with the Holy Spirit. Maria Cimperman encourages a contemplative outlook, recognizing that dialogue requires “reflectively and prayerfully seeking to hear what the Spirit might be inviting us to” (171).

This can’t be emphasized enough. Mission must begin with deep listening. To God, to the people of the place, to the land itself, and to the stories that have shaped the relations in particular places.

Over the last several years, I have participated in a number of learning experiences that have forced me to listen deeply to new perspectives. I have sat with members of Grassy Narrows First Nation as they described the pain of witnessing the abuse of their land and its toll on their people. I have eaten meals with my host family in Guatemala and heard them describe the pain of losing their son in an accident while he was a migrant worker in the United States. I have engaged in conversation with women and men living on the streets of so many cities. I have repeatedly found myself on the listening end of dialogues with people pushed to the margins of society. These moments felt so divine, and my only role was to listen. My instinct wanted me to provide solutions. But I could only offer presence and words of grace and peace after engaging in long bouts of listening; my role was to listen first and then to speak.

As I move from a season of mobility and travel into a season of rootedness in a particular place, I want to continue to root my presence with others in a state of listening before speaking, gathering before teaching, solidarity before advocacy. Bevans and Ross have provided a rich text to help those of us with similar aspirations to work through our responses to injustice and our desire to engage in mission in a pluralistic and fractured world.

I am left with questions of course: How do we ensure our listening does not come with preconditions? Is dialogue ever not a power struggle between competing parties? At what point(s) do we speak out, and what is the role of the prophetic word in dialogue? Is evangelism our ultimate goal in beginning any dialogue with someone from another faith? I am not sure *Mission on the Road to Emmaus* answers these

questions, but if anything, it opens the door toward a less patronizing and colonizing approach to mission. For too long missionaries have wielded a power that has hurt and maimed God's creation and those who dwell within it. Perhaps prophetic dialogue as an approach to mission could yield the beauty of reconciliation and the wonder of peacemaking in a world desperate for both. Perhaps prophetic dialogue is a dance we ought to get caught up into, and listening is just the first step.

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Ched Myers, ed., *Watershed Discipleship: Reinhabiting Bioregional Faith and Practice*, Cascade, Eugene, OR, 2016. 223 pp. \$30.00. ISBN: 9781498280761.

The Huu-ay-aht First Nation live on the west coast of Vancouver Island, ninety kilometers down a rough gravel road from Port Alberni, British Columbia. The community operates a campground on the coast of the Pacific Ocean at the mouth of the Pachena River. I read *Watershed Discipleship* while my family and I were guests of the Huu-ay-aht for four nights this past August, on the land that has been the Huu-ay-aht home for thousands of years. Being in a place like that, surrounded by a mature temperate rain forest and a deep, soft, sandy beach—the ancient home of people who have lived there in balance with the land for countless generations—it was easy to think about the terms and conditions of human life. The relationship I have with the planet—its biological possibilities, its physical constraints—was made plain there. The place is rich and vast, but my footprint was more visible, my waste more obscene.

There is nothing among the Huu-ay-aht that makes the patterns of destructive consumption in Western civilization seem natural or reasonable. Being there, I saw again the immensity and fecundity of the planet, and I was both encouraged and overwhelmed. But my memory was good, and I could still remember the place where I had come from, the suburban town where I live, and I recalled with crystal clarity how life there feels nothing like this damp and foggy forest springing up out of the sand on the edge of the world. Where I live, it is entirely reasonable to never consider the non-negotiable biological limits of the planet. It is entirely reasonable (to most people) to live there and not know anything about where you live.

Are we, the inhabitants of this planet, in a watershed moment? Or has the moment passed? Have we passed the point of no return, consuming our way past what is sustainable? Ched Myers describes the “resisting and renewing” movement of